

Background Press Information

Municipal Solid Waste Reduction: Can It Be Done?

A wide variety of communities have achieved waste reduction levels of 40 to 65 percent for residential municipal solid waste (MSW) and several have achieved reductions of from 42 to 68 percent for institutional and commercial MSW. The

table below summarizes a number of communities successes in waste reduction. (*Cutting the Waste Stream in Half: Community Record-Setters Show How*, EPA-530-R-99-013, June 1999, EPA-530-F-99-017, October 1999, www.epa.gov/osw.)

Community Source Reduction Efforts

Community	Population	Waste Generation (Tons)	Reduction Level (%)
URBAN			
Ann Arbor, Michigan	112,000	47,900	52
Madison, Wisconsin	201,000	88,600	50
Portland, Oregon*	503,000	967,000	50
San Jose, California*	873,000	1,315,000	43
Seattle, Washington*	544,000	768,000	44
Worcester, Massachusetts	170,000	57,000	54
SUBURBAN			
Bellevue, Washington	104,000	39,000	60
Bergen County, NJ	825,000	1,086,000	54
Chatham, New Jersey	8,300	8,000	65
Clifton, New Jersey	75,000	110,930	56
Falls Church, Virginia	10,000	6,700	65
RURAL			
Crockett, Texas	8,300	2,700	52
Dover, New Hampshire	26,100	9,500	52
Fitchburg, Wisconsin	17,300	4,200	50
Leverett, Massachusetts	1,900	650	53
Visalia, California	91,300	50,800	50

*These communities include commercial and institutional MSW in addition to residential MSW.

Strategies driving record-setting waste reduction strategies include:

- **Targeting a wide range of materials**

These record-setting communities recover 17 to 31 different types of materials. Paper recovery contributes 12 to 45 percent of residential materials diverted. Composting of yard debris diverts 17 to 43 percent of total residential waste in these communities.

- **Composting**

For ten of the 18 record-setters, composting accounted for more than half of all residential waste reduction. Fall leaf collection may be the single largest contributor to waste reduction in communities with fall seasons.

- **Designing for convenience**

Residents are more likely to participate if set-out requirements are uncomplicated and recyclables collection is frequent. Providing adequate containers for materials storage and set-out also improves convenience. Providing both curbside collection and drop-off sites for materials gives residents more recycling options. On-site recycling at multi-family buildings makes recycling convenient to more residents.

- **Using “pay-as-you-throw” fees**
Under “pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) systems, residents pay by volume or weight for trash they set out at the curb. Such fees are a direct economic incentive to reduce trash and recover as much as possible. Eleven of the record-setters use PAYT fees.

- **Requiring resident participation**
Local requirements and mandates encourage program participation. Eleven of the record-setters have some type of local ordinance requiring residents to source-separate recyclables from trash or banning set-out of designated materials with their trash.

- **Education**
Recordsetters have targeted education at new residents and at all ethnicities. Repeat messages in a variety of media. Talk to you customers. Solicit input and give feedback on program progress.

- **Program planning**
Recordsetters build broad support during the planning stages by seeking public input, selling the program to those active in the community (such as service and civic clubs), and building political support. Learn from others’ experiences. Find out what other communities have accomplished and how they did it.